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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 002714

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SNAR ECON PTER KJUS CO MX

SUBJECT: GOC SHARES LESSONS WITH MEXICO, BUT CHALLENGES

LOOM

REF: A. MEXICO 001339

¶B. BOGOTA 001203

¶C. BOGOTA 000335

Classified By: Political Counselor Mark Wells,
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Colombia is deepening its cooperation with Mexico and sharing the hard-won lessons it learned combating narcotraffickers under Plan Colombia. The two governments used Mexican President Felipe Calderon's August 12-13 Bogota visit to announce increased GOC training of Mexican police, while Mexican helicopter pilots are slated to arrive in October for training by the Colombian military. The GOC is already seeing benefits from this increased engagement, as Calderon became the first major Latin American leader to urge moderation in recent regional tensions over GOC-USG security cooperation. Still, significant challenges remain, as GOC officials tell us that attempts to work with Mexican counterparts have not been as successful as had been hoped.
End Summary.

INVESTIGATORS, POLICE, AND PILOTS

¶2. (U) The Government of Colombia (GOC) and Government of Mexico (GOM) on August 13 announced a boost in bilateral security cooperation in training Mexican federal police. Under the Colombia-Mexico Police Cooperation Program, Colombia would increase ongoing GOC-GOM programs as part of an international effort--including the United States--to train up to 10,000 police (see septel for details). The GOC has also begun responding to GOM requests to provide training to Mexican police in a wide variety of specializations based on several decades' worth of lessons learned from fighting narcotraffickers. These efforts build on existing programs, such as the training provided to Mexican counternarcotics (CN) police by the elite commando "Junglas" force of the Colombian National Police (CNP).

¶3. (C) The GOC is also looking to share its lessons learned from air mobility, which has been a key tool in battling narcotrafficking (ref B). A small test group of Mexican helicopter pilots is tentatively scheduled to come to Colombia in October for training from the Colombian Air Force, according to Deputy Defense Minister Juan Pinzon. If this training goes well, the GOC could train up to 30 Mexican pilots per year for 5-7 years, depending on program requirements and funding. (Note: Training 24-30 pilots annually would require additional investments in training aircraft and infrastructure, which DOD is studying).

BILATERAL RELATIONS GROWING, BEARING FRUIT

¶ 4. (C) The intensifying security cooperation takes place against the backdrop of a burgeoning bilateral relationship. During Calderon's visit, the two countries signed a free trade agreement that expands a limited 1994 agreement to include many agricultural and certain industrial goods. The two countries are also considering signing a strategic partnership agreement, according to the August 13 joint announcement. In addition to these, Colombia has sought to deepen bilateral ties by helping Mexico revive Plan Puebla-Panama, which seeks to bolster Central American development. Colombian MFA officials Alicia Alfaro and German Castaneda told us earlier this year that Colombia and Mexico see this as a way to counter Venezuelan influence in Central America and the Caribbean by offering alternative energy assistance through the construction of small-scale biodiesel plants, among other projects (ref C).

¶ 5. (U) The GOC is already seeing benefits from this increased engagement, as Calderon came out in support of Colombia in recent regional tensions over GOC-USG security cooperation. Calderon said from Bogota that the GOM respected the GOC's "sovereign decision" to allow U.S. troops access to seven Colombian military bases, and he reiterated that President Obama had told him the week before that the United States had no plans to set up military bases in Colombia. Calderon also offered to mediate between the GOC and its regional critics.

PROBLEMS ON THE HORIZON

¶ 6. (C) Still, Colombian officials report some bumps in the road. Presidential foreign affairs advisor Paola Holguin

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told us of GOC worries that Calderon's strong will to cooperate with Colombia will not translate into action at lower levels of government in Mexico. Holguin--a political officer in Colombia's Mexico City embassy until March 2009--believes there is an overall unwillingness in the GOM to acknowledge the depth of the problem of narcotrafficking, in the ability of narco-groups to penetrate the Mexican state. While acknowledging that Colombia itself faces corruption-related problems, she noted that non-federal police structures in Mexico are particularly vulnerable to narco-related corruption. Officers usually serve in their hometowns, she said, and therefore frequently know the local drug traffickers personally--which allows the traffickers to target the officers and/or their families with bribes and threats. Colonel Jorge Rodriguez, Colombian Police Attaché in the Mexico City embassy, reported he had found it difficult to persuade Mexican police officials that they could learn from Colombia's experiences.

¶ 7. (C) In the same vein, Carabineros (rural police) Major Jorge Blanco told us of widespread frustration within the CNP over attempts to work with--or even communicate with--Mexican police attaches in Mexico's embassy in Colombia. Holguin and Blanco also noted separately that structural problems have impeded cooperation, as the Mexican Army--which they said has been the main CN force in Mexico--is proscribed from working with foreign police forces like the CNP, which has the most CN experience in Colombia. These types of roadblocks threaten to undermine the institutionalization of the bilateral relationship, which Holguin and Colombian MFA officials have told us will be crucial in sustaining and deepening the good will of the two presidents.

Brownfield